

# Measuring party attachments with survey questionnaires

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## Abstract

In the study of voter behaviour, survey questionnaires have long been central. The American National Election Studies, which started in 1952 in the United States, were used as a template for similar long-standing election surveys in several countries in Europe. The American survey questions on party identification have become a standard for measuring party attachments, albeit that to be able to apply them in other countries and in cross-national research they had to be adjusted. This chapter presents an inventory of the most widely used survey items that measure party attachments, analyses how they link up to different conceptualizations of partisanship, including negative partisanship and multiple partisanship, and assesses their measurement quality. The review includes several suggested alternatives for question wording as well as the use of multi-item indices. The chapter concludes with recommendations for the measurement of partisanship in future research.

**Keywords:** party attachments, voting behaviour, partisanship, measurement, survey question wording, multi-item index

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When researchers started to use survey questionnaires to study elections, this stimulated the development of new theories about voting behaviour. The most influential intellectual contribution was arguably made by Angus Campbell et al. (1954, 1960) from the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. They emphasized that in order to understand why people vote as they do, it is crucial to map how political objects are represented in their mind. They added that this involves not only the cognitive representation, but also the affective orientation towards those objects. This led Campbell et al. to introduce the concept of party identification, which indicates the psychological attachment that a person feels to a political party. The survey items that they introduced to measure party attachments in the United States, and their equivalents in other languages, have become standard items in large-scale election studies in many countries.

The standard survey questions about party attachments clearly have their merits, but also their limitations. This led several scholars to emphasize different ways of looking at partisanship and to advocate alternative survey items. First, some argued that especially in a multi-party system, citizens may identify with more than one party, which has consequences for how party attachments are best measured. Second, other scholars argued that partisan attachments can also be negative instead of positive, and that such feelings require alternative measures. Third, still others argued that if party attachments are viewed through the prism of social identity theory, the validity and reliability of the measurement can be improved by linking survey questions more closely to this theory and by increasing the number of items.

Before we continue, let us clarify our use of terminology in this chapter, since the topic of the psychological bond between voters and parties has been discussed in the academic literature with a multitude of terms: for example, partisanship, party identification, partisan identity, partisan self-image, partisan attitudes, party loyalties and party evaluations. We use the notion of party attachments to refer to any kind of affect-laden evaluation of political parties among people, stored in their long-term memory. Within this category we distinguish between partisan identities (or party identification) and partisan attitudes (or party evaluations). We consider partisanship to be a broader concept, which may include but is not limited to party attachments; for example, it may include party membership, or a past voting record favouring a particular party. These fall beyond the scope of this chapter, which aims to provide a review of survey measures of party attachments as defined above.

From here, the chapter proceeds as follows. First, we discuss the conceptualization of party attachments. After all, how survey questions are best phrased depends first and foremost on what they intend to measure. We start with reflecting on the original conceptualization of party identification by Campbell et al. (1954, 1960). Then we discuss the conceptual distinction between partisan identities and partisan attitudes, the notion of multiple party attachments, and negative partisanship. We then shift our attention to the measurement, and reflect on the standard survey questions in the American National Election Studies (ANES). Next, we discuss how they have been translated and adjusted for the use in other countries. Then we provide a review of multi-item measures that are more firmly grounded in

social identity theory, before addressing questions that concern partisan attitudes and which are better able to incorporate multiple partisanship and negative partisanship. Towards the end of the chapter, we discuss question wording effects, while finishing with general conclusions and recommendations for measuring party attachments in surveys.

## **THE CONCEPT OF PARTY IDENTIFICATION**

The notion of a psychological attachment between voters and political parties became central in voting research when scholars in the United States tried to explain the strong stability in election outcomes. The first idea of a stable component that has a long-lasting impact on vote choice can be found in the works of the Columbia school (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948). They introduced an Index of Political Predisposition (IPP), which indicates the concurrence of social group belongings that impact upon partisan preferences. The IPP, consisting of socio-economic status, religious affiliation, and rural versus urban residence, classifies voters on a scale ranging from strong Democratic to strong Republican dispositions. However, its usefulness for predicting vote choice was largely contested (Campbell et al., 1960). A few years later, the Michigan group introduced the concept of party identification, which heavily relied on reference group theory as a theoretical base (Belknap and Campbell, 1951; see also, Campbell et al., 1954, 1960). Instead of other social groups, now the political party itself is the point of reference for adherents. This attachment appears to have a strong impact on candidate choice in elections (Belknap and Campbell, 1951: 618).

Party identification is elaborated upon more deeply in later works and then conceptualized as a psychological attachment towards a party ‘which can persist without legal recognition or evidence of formal membership and even without a consistent record of party support’ (Campbell et al., 1960: 121). Its conceptualization encompasses a long-standing feeling of belonging to a party that is part of the self-concept, combined with positive affection. In *The Voter Decides* (Campbell et al., 1954), party identification is referred to as one’s self-description of belonging to a party, ‘thought of themselves as belonging to the party’ (ibid.: 111), as well as having an affective component of liking the party. In the same sense, in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960) party identification is defined as ‘the individual’s affective orientation to an important group-object in his environment’ (ibid.: 121), a longstanding ‘sense of individual attachment’ to a political party that leads to thinking of oneself as belonging to a party. In a similar vein, Miller and Shanks (1996: 120) conceptualize party identification as part of an individual’s social identity, where the party attachment is part of a person’s self-concept. The authors compare it to religious affiliation, arguing that party identification shapes the self-image of voters accordingly to think of themselves in terms of partisanship. The causal pathway between party identification and vote choice is elaborated in *The American Voter*, which posits that party attachments influence election-specific attitudes related to issues, candidates and social groups, which in turn shape the vote.

Whereas Campbell et al. (1954, 1960) emphasized the stability of party identification and its position early in a causal chain ('funnel of causality'), other scholars questioned the view of party identification as an 'unmoved mover'. The 'revisionists' posited that party identification is more volatile than originally presumed and operates like a continually updated evaluation ('running tally') in response to recent experiences (e.g., Brody and Rothenberg, 1988; Fiorina, 1981). What they did not challenge so much, though, is the core idea that psychological attachments with political parties can be viewed as party identification with a directional component (which party voters identify with) and a strength component (how strongly they identify with them).

## **PARTISAN IDENTITIES VERSUS PARTISAN ATTITUDES**

The idea that party identification is part of a person's self-concept matched, at least implicitly, with reference group theory, but became more pronounced when social identity theory reached prominence in social psychology. The theories do not contradict each other; rather, the social identity approach enhances reference group theory and fills the voids (Brewer and Brown, 1998). If *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960) were written today, we are confident that it would explicitly mention the social identity approach (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). At the heart of this theory are the notions of self-categorization (people consider themselves to be part of a particular group) and subjective importance of the group membership (e.g., Leach et al., 2008). The concept of party identification as originally introduced links up closely to this theory. In the decades that have passed since, several scholars emphasized that psychological attachments with political parties are best viewed through the prism of social identity theory (Green et al., 2002; Greene, 1999b; Huddy et al., 2015; Weisberg and Greene, 2003).

Social identity is certainly not the only psychological concept that researchers may use to define party attachments. Another candidate is the notion of attitudes, which can be simply defined as 'an association in memory between a given object and one's evaluation of that object' (Fazio, 1990: 81). Viewed this way, partisanship corresponds with the set of attitudes – positive, or negative, to a certain degree – towards each of the individual parties. In principle, partisanship may be conceptualized in terms of social identity as well as attitudes (Bartle and Bellucci, 2009; Greene, 1999a; Rosema, 2006). In the light of scepticism about the usefulness of the party identification survey measures in several European countries (e.g., Shively, 1972; Thomassen and Rosema, 2009), one of us proposed to conceive of partisanship in multi-party parliamentary systems in terms of attitudes instead of identification (Rosema, 2004, 2006). The underlying idea is that if few citizens identify with a political party, some form of psychological attachment may still exist and be captured better by the notion of attitudes.

This alternative conceptualization would match with the notions of evaluation and affective orientation from the original conceptualization, but deviate from the idea that such attachments are part of the self-concept and involve a sense of group belonging. Conceptualizing partisanship in terms of

attitudes resembles how in American survey research the affective orientations towards candidates are usually analysed: these are referred to as ‘candidate evaluations’, and typically measured with affect-oriented ratings scales known as ‘feeling thermometers’. Conceptualizing party attachments as partisan attitudes not only allows for the possibility of multiple partisanship (people may evaluate two or more parties rather positively), but also can easily incorporate the notion of negative partisanship (people may evaluate parties negatively). Therefore, for research in which these elements of partisanship are relevant, conceptualizing it in terms of partisan attitudes instead of partisan identities may be valuable.

## **SINGLE VERSUS MULTIPLE PARTISANSHIP**

Even though Campbell et al. (1954) acknowledged that individuals may identify with more than one party, they ruled this out for the American two-party system due to the strong contrast between both major parties. In *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960), no further references can be found to multiple partisanship. However, other authors early on discussed the possibility of attachments to multiple parties, especially in a multi-party system or due to the multi-level nature of politics. Thus, two separate strands of literature on multiple partisanship developed in Europe and the United States.

The first strand discusses multiple attachments in terms of different identifications on various levels of government (e.g., Blake, 1982; Jennings and Niemi, 1966; Niemi et al., 1987). This is most likely to be relevant in federal systems, such as the United States or Canada. Citizens may then feel attached to one political party at the federal level, but to another at the state or provincial level. Consequently, considerable proportions of the population may have multiple identifications that emerge due to changing political context on a lower level of government. This might help to explain the intransitivity problem that independent leaners are often more politically active than weak partisans (Niemi et al., 1987). Furthermore, these studies sometimes question the interpretation of independence as the mere absence of an attachment with any party. Instead, thinking of yourself as an independent should be considered a distinct dimension of partisanship, some argued (e.g., Kamieniecki, 1988; Weisberg, 1980).

The European strand did not look at partisanship at different governmental levels, or identification as an independent, but focused on simultaneous attachments with several parties on the same level of government. The possibility of voters feeling attached to both major parties had already received attention in the United States (Weisberg, 1980), but multiple attachments seem most likely in multi-party systems, especially if there are more parties on the same side of a deep societal divide (for example, Northern Ireland; see Garry, 2007) or within the same ideological family (for example, the Netherlands; see van der Eijk and Niemöller, 1983). Multiple identifications might be caused by sociological cross-pressures (Mayer and Schultze, 2019). For example, if in a certain country the party system reflects the cleavages of religion and social class, both group memberships (for example, being Catholic and belonging to the working class) might lead to attachments with the parties that represent either group.

However, other mechanisms underlying multiple attachments, including the ideological similarity of political parties, are conceivable as well (Schmitt, 2009). Whatever the mechanism, the key point is that in multi-party systems, citizens may feel attached to two or more parties and ideally the measurement should adequately capture this.

## **POSITIVE VERSUS NEGATIVE PARTISANSHIP**

Contrary to multiple partisanship, the phenomenon of negative partisanship was already explicitly installed in the works of Campbell et al. (1960: 122): ‘the political party serves as the group toward which the individual may develop an identification, positive or negative, of some degree of intensity’. Although negative party identification appears part of the original concept, Campbell et al. (1954, 1960) did not measure and analyse negative attachments. Since then, the mainstream of party identification research has also concentrated on positive identification (Richardson, 1991: 759). The strength of negative feelings may differ among party identifiers, however, and impact upon their voting behaviour: the more hostile one feels towards the opposing party, the more likely one is to vote in line with positive partisan identities (Maggiotto and Piereson, 1977: 747).

If we take a look at the few existing studies on negative partisanship, we see that the conceptualization is seldom stated clearly and may be viewed in different ways. First, negative partisanship might be caused by positive party identification (Maggiotto and Piereson, 1977; Richardson, 1991; implicitly Abramowitz and Webster, 2018). This means that a sense of a belonging to a political party is a necessary – and in a polarized two-party system perhaps sufficient – precondition to develop negative partisanship towards another party (compare with intergroup emotions theory; see Mackie et al., 2000; Mackie et al., 2009). Second, in contrast, negative partisanship might exist separately from positive identifications: Voters might be strongly against a party without the need of identifying with another party (Crewe, 1976; Mayer, 2017b; Medeiros and Noël, 2014). The post-communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe provide a context in which this was particularly likely (Rose and Mishler, 1998). If such negative sentiments are considered relevant, the question remains whether they are best conceptualized in terms of the psychological concept of identities or as attitudes. In our view, the latter concept is better suited, because we doubt that for negative sentiments self-categorization applies in the way that social identity theory presumes.

Building on the distinction between positive and negative partisanship, some scholars chose the difference between both as a topic of study. A common term to indicate this is ‘affective polarization’. In a two-party system, this refers to the degree to which feelings towards a voter’s favourite party deviate from the same voter’s feelings towards the other party. The degree of affective polarization is related to the extent that party preferences match with other social group belonging (‘partisan sorting’) and the ideological differences between both parties (‘partisan polarization’) (see Iyengar et al., 2012; Mason, 2015). In multi-party systems, how exactly to conceptualize and measure affective polarization is less

straightforward, but here too it may be an element of partisanship worth analysing by combining measures for positive and negative partisanship (see, e.g., Lauka et al., 2018).

## **ORIGINAL AMERICAN SURVEY QUESTIONS**

Let us now shift our attention to the measurement of party attachments (see Chapter 4 in this volume by Carius-Munz). Whereas party identification was immediately conceptualized as an enduring psychological attachment to a reference group by Belknap and Campbell (1951), the initial operationalization of party identification substantially changed to bring it in line with this view. In the first work, which used data from the ANES in 1948, party identification was operationalized by asking people for their party choice in a hypothetical immediate presidential election (Belknap and Campbell, 1951: 601). The authors acknowledged two shortcomings of this operationalization: it might classify citizens for whom parties mean very little as partisans, and it fails to tap degrees of identification. As early as 1952, the type of questions that are still used today were introduced, starting with: ‘Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?’ (Campbell et al., 1954: 217). This question clearly uses self-categorization as a basis, while the words ‘generally speaking’ and ‘usually’ prompt the presumed enduring nature of the attachment. A follow-up question was asked to those who express a partisan attachment in order to measure its strength: ‘Would you call yourself a strong (Democrat/Republican) or a not very strong (Democrat/Republican)?’ Hence, party identification is measured in two steps, to capture a directional component and strength component: first, it is determined whether an attachment exists at all and with which party; second, the strength of this attachment is measured, distinguishing between voters who only feel weakly attached to their party and those for whom their partisanship is of greater importance (Campbell et al., 1954: 91). The two items can be combined into a single ordinal scale with five positions: strong Democrats, weak Democrats, independents, weak Republicans and strong Republicans.

The people who classify themselves as independents or have ‘no preference’ (since 1966) were also given a follow-up question, but of a different nature. They were asked, ‘Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party?’ (Campbell et al., 1954: 218). The answers to those questions can be merged with the other items to create a seven-point scale, dividing the independents from the five-point scale across three categories: Democratic leaners, pure independents (who still express no preference for either party), and Republican leaners. It has been a matter of dispute whether this question should be incorporated when analysing party attachments. Some scholars argued that the so-called leaners behave fairly similarly to weak identifiers and hence should be considered partisans (Keith, 1992; see also Baker and Renno, 2019); whereas others, such as Miller (1991) and Miller and Shanks (1996), argued that the root question that asks for self-classification should be used as a basis and hence all independents should be considered non-identifiers.

The same self-classification questions were used in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960), which utilizes data from the ANES in 1956, and comparable survey items have been included in the ANES ever since. The authors advocated for its use as it allows to measure partisanship not as a dichotomy but on a continuum: ‘we suppose that party identification is not simply a dichotomy but has a wide range of intensities in each partisan direction’ (Campbell et al., 1960: 122–124). However, the process behind why this wording was chosen, how the questions relate to social-psychological instrument development, and whether there were competing potential wordings, are not discussed in any of the works of Campbell et al. (1954, 1960). In addition, no arguments are presented as to why they preferred a single item to a multi-item instrument, and why they distinguished only two strength categories. Given the central position of the concept in political research, it seems surprising that more fine-tuned measures of partisan identities have never become more common in election surveys.

## **EXPORTING SURVEY MEASURES OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES**

The American research inspired scholars elsewhere in the world to develop comparable survey items for measuring party attachments in their countries (see Table A1 in the Online Appendix for an overview). Sometimes the original question wording could easily be applied and only the party names had to be replaced. However, several sorts of small adjustments were additionally made. The British Election Studies (BES), for example, asked people in the 1963–66 panel the following question: ‘Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal, or what?’ (Butler and Stokes, 1969: 562–602). Notice that the option of being an independent is not explicitly mentioned. Initially ‘or what’ was omitted as well, but this was added in 1964. Those who provided a party name were next asked, ‘How strongly (chosen party) do you generally feel – very strongly, fairly strongly, or not very strongly?’, thus allowing for three instead of two levels of strength of partisanship. People who reported no party affiliation were asked, ‘Do you generally feel a little closer to one of the parties than the others?’; and if responding affirmatively, ‘Which party is that?’ The format used in the most recent BES panel survey (2014–18) is still the same, except that the word ‘usually’ has been dropped and the third party is now called the Liberal Democrats. The Canadian Election Studies adopted a comparable format for the root question, but explicitly refer to federal politics and offer ‘none of these’ as an answer option instead of ‘independent’ (Blais et al., 2001). Their follow-up question distinguishes three levels of strength in the same way as the British item, while non-identifiers receive no follow-up question.

The question wording in election surveys in other countries sometimes deviates in the sense that party labels are not explicitly mentioned in the question, but respondents are asked whether they are a supporter or adherent of a particular party, and if so which one (see Table A1 in the Online Appendix). The Swedish National Election Studies and the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies, for example, adopted this format. The first reason for changing the format is that including up to a dozen party names



makes the question awkward and unsuitable. Secondly, in some languages there is no equivalent for the original phrase. For example, Dutch citizens would not say something like, 'I am a KVP-er'. The follow-up question aimed at assessing the strength of partisanship asks Dutch respondents whether they consider themselves as 'convinced' or 'not very convinced' adherents. These words appear to have a different connotation than 'weak' and 'strong', but nevertheless enable researchers to distinguish between different levels of strength of the attachment.

The same structure is used in the widely administered surveys of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). They first ask respondents, 'Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular party?' and after having asked which party ('What party is that?'), they ask about the strength of the attachment: 'Do you feel very close to this party, somewhat close, or not very close?' The number of respondents in CSES module 1 that spontaneously mentioned two or more parties varied between 0 per cent in the United States and 22 per cent in Norway (Schmitt, 2009). Where respondents mention more than one party, they are asked which one they feel closest to, before the strength question is presented. Those who did not mention any party in response to the first question were next asked, 'Do you feel yourself a little closer to one of the political parties than the others?' and 'Which party is that?' This can be viewed as an alternative for the leaner question in the American surveys. Despite the differences, all these question formats have two key things in common with the original items: they measure partisanship by distinguishing a directional and strength component, and for both they rely on respondents' self-classification.

On the basis of the aforementioned type of items, the international transferability of the party identification concept was often favourably evaluated (for example, Australia: Aitkin, 1977; Denmark: Borre and Katz, 1973; France: Converse and Dupeux, 1962; United Kingdom: Butler and Stokes, 1969; Norway: Campbell and Valen, 1961). A notable exception is the Netherlands, where it has been questioned whether the concept can be meaningfully applied (Richardson, 1991; Thomassen, 1975; Thomassen and Rosema, 2009). The problem with Dutch survey data was twofold: party attachments appeared to be virtually indistinguishable from vote choice (citizens identified with the party they voted for, and vice versa); and if differences were found, then partisan attachments appeared to be less stable than vote choice, contrary to what the original theory posited (but see Green and Schickler, 2009; Schickler and Green, 1997). Thomassen (1975) argued that in the Netherlands the prime objects of identification of voters are not political parties, but the social groups whose interests particular parties represent (for example, a religious group or social class); in the words of Richardson (1991: 767), partisanship here was a 'cleavage echo'. Holmberg (1994: 100), amongst others, emphasized that the strong correlation between party identification and vote choice does not imply that such lasting attachments with political parties have not developed, but as an element in theories of voting they then lose their value.

## **SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY-BASED SURVEY ITEMS**

It is surprising that the measurement of party identification has not really developed much since the early years, and that the original measure, which is rather crude, is still so widely employed. Given the central position of the concept of party identification in electoral research, one might have expected researchers to demand stronger reliability and more precision than what can be offered with the standard items. Moreover, it seems almost self-evident that there are better, more scientific ways to determine the strength of an identification than merely asking an individual if it is weak, moderate or strong. With such considerations in mind, some scholars have advocated the use of multi-item indices that link up closely to the concept of social identity (Bankert et al., 2017; Greene, 1999b; Mayer, 2017a).

In general, there are at least three reasons why multi-item indices might be preferred to single-item measures, which also apply to the study of party attachments. First, the concepts that social scientists use are often too complex to be able to grasp them with one or few items. For instance, for measuring the concept of personality, psychologists often distinguish five dimensions and use multiple items to measure each (McCrae and Costa, 1987). Likewise, social identities combine several dimensions. One widely cited study (Leach et al., 2008) distinguished five components, while scholars who analysed partisan identities distinguished two dimensions (Greene, 1999a) or three dimensions (Mayer, 2017a; Mayer and Schultze, 2019). Second, because the measurement with any item includes a certain level of unreliability, multi-item measures limit the random error and bias. In other words, multi-item measures typically have better validity and reliability than single-item measures. Third, using multiple items usually leads to more precision (DeVellis, 2017). Whereas a single dichotomous item such as the ANES follow-up question about the strength of identification only enables researchers to distinguish two levels of intensity, combining more items would automatically create more levels.

Greene (1999a, 1999b, 2004) pioneered this social identity approach to partisanship. He applied a ten-item scale of identification with a psychological group (Mael and Tetrick, 1992). Building on this work, other scholars tested the same and additional items in five other political contexts: Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom (see Table A2 in the Online Appendix for an overview of all items). When scrutinizing those items, it becomes clear that they tap into different elements of social identities. First, some statements link up to the idea of self-categorization. This concerns, more specifically, questions that ask whether people refer to a political party as ‘my party’, or refer to a party as ‘us’ instead of as ‘them’. The personal relevance of the identity is manifested in the positive and negative emotions that people experience with respect to a party: for example, when others praise or criticize a party, or when it is successful. A third component concerns people’s relationship with other partisans, which has been focused on cognitively in terms of self-stereotyping (for example, the extent to which people consider themselves to be similar to other party supporters) as well as affectively in terms of the connection that people experience with others who support the same party. Finally, there are items that do link up to any of the aforementioned elements, such as people being

interested in what others think of someone's favourite political party. Jointly, these items match well with the original conceptualization by Campbell et al. (1954, 1960): the self-categorization items clearly indicate that the political party is part of the self-image, and indicate a sense of belonging to a party, whereas the items in the other categories are indicators of the psychological importance of the attachment.

## **MULTI-ITEM SCALES OF PARTISAN IDENTITIES**

The responses to a set of items that are grounded in social identity theory can be transformed into a single measure for partisan identity by simply adding the values of the responses, or taking their average. Self-evidently, the responses need to have been given on the same rating scale, and scores of negatively phrased items (e.g., 'I don't act like the typical person of this group') have to be reversed (Spector, 1992: 30). The internal consistency, or reliability, of such a scale is commonly assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha. The value depends on the number of items and the strength of their correlations, and values above 0.70 are generally considered to be acceptable (DeVellis, 2017: Ch. 3; Spector, 1992: 32). Although such analyses have their limitations, they are a valuable step towards assessing the quality of the resulting scales.

Table 9.1 shows that in all six aforementioned countries the internal consistency of the scale reached the preferred level. Greene's (1999a, 1999b) study among a sample of 271 university students resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 and thus showed that the identification with a psychological group scale can be applied to partisan identities (Greene, 1999a: 96). In a German study by Mayer (2017a) among 169 university students that used similar items, the value of Cronbach's alpha was 0.83; while virtually identical items in the Italian National Election Studies (ITANES 2011) give an alpha that equals 0.81. In other studies, five of the items from Greene's (1999b) study were slightly rephrased and complemented with three new items in order to specifically target the identification with political parties (Bankert et al., 2017: 112). This alternative eight-item index was successfully pilot-tested with a convenience sample of German citizens (N = 207), since Cronbach's alpha was 0.86 (Rosema and Huddy, 2012), while subsequent national surveys in Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom also resulted in high alpha values, namely 0.83, 0.86 and 0.88, respectively (Bankert et al., 2017: 114). In brief, across six countries with samples ranging between small convenience samples (<200) to large random samples (>1000), these type of items consistently performed well when combined in an index. Their usefulness is further substantiated by a range of validity tests, which show that such measures correlate more strongly than the traditional party identification scale with a range of other political variables (Bankert et al., 2017; Greene, 1999b; Mayer, 2017a).

**Table 9.1 Internal consistency of multi-item indices of partisan identities in six countries**

Country	Sample	Sample size	Items	Cronbach's alpha	Study
United States	Local students	271	10	0.85	Greene (1999a, 1999b)
Germany	Local students	169	10	0.83	Mayer (2017a)
Italy	National electorate	1034	10	0.81	ITANES 2011
Germany	Convenience sample	207	8	0.86	Rosema and Huddy (2012)
Netherlands	National electorate	4680	8	0.86	Bankert et al. (2017)
Sweden	Mixed*	2464	8	0.83	Bankert et al. (2017)
United Kingdom	National electorate	5954	8	0.88	Bankert et al. (2017)

*Note:* \* 70% opt-in; 30% probability-based.

The studies that analysed partisan identity items have also pointed to a number of additional conclusions. First, Greene (1999a, 1999b) found that the same items can be used to create a reliable scale for identification as an independent. However, the strength of such an identity tended to be rather low, which suggests that there is not much reason to incorporate similar statements about independents as a group in election surveys. Second, although a scale based on all eight items performed better, a scale combining the four strongest items also still outperformed the traditional party identification scale in validity analyses (Bankert et al., 2017). Therefore, if limited survey space does not allow the inclusion of a full battery, an abbreviated version may be useful. Third, including multiple items to measure the attachment with only one party overlooks the important fact that voters may also be attached to more than one party. Mayer and Schultze (2019) found that among German citizens who answered an abbreviated version of the scale for multiple political parties, about half of the respondents who were classified as partisans identified with two or more parties. This is at odds with the assumption that partisan identities can be conceived best in terms of direction and strength. This means that in order to

achieve better insight on the presence and effects of partisan identities in multi-party systems, the focus on measuring the attachment with a single party might have to be abandoned in future research.

## **ATTITUDINAL MEASURES OF PARTISANSHIP**

Party attachments can be conceived of as a specific case of a social identity, but this is not the only psychological concept that may be used for its conceptualization. Another concept from psychology that links up to the notion of an affective orientation, and which may thus be used, is that of attitudes (Bartle and Bellucci, 2009; Greene, 1999b; Rosema, 2006). Election surveys have frequently included measures of partisan attitudes, which ask people to rate individual political parties on a scale that represents their evaluation along a positive–negative continuum.

The question format that election surveys have used for measuring partisan attitudes differs across countries. American National Election Studies use so-called ‘feeling thermometers’: since 1964, survey participants have been asked to evaluate the main presidential candidates as well as the Democratic Party and Republican Party on a scale with values ranging between 0 (very cold) and 100 (very warm); initially the survey spoke about Democrats and Republicans, but since 1978 it asks respondents to rate the Democratic Party and Republican Party. Because nine of the positions are labelled, in practice this scale operates as a nine-point scale (Alwin, 1997). Election surveys in other countries have used different question wordings, values and labels to assess partisan attitudes. For instance, the Swedish National Election Studies has asked voters to rate individual parties on a scale from –5 (dislike strongly) to +5 (like strongly). The Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies have asked people to rate how ‘sympathetic’ they consider each political party on a scale from 0 (very unsympathetic) to 10 (very sympathetic); in earlier surveys values ranged between 0 and 100, but in practice the scale already operated much like an 11-point scale (Rosema, 2004). The Dutch question nicely illustrates the difficulty of translating statements into other languages, because whereas the connotation of the English word ‘sympathetic’ may include an element of pity or sorrow, in Dutch that element is absent. However, the English words ‘like’ and ‘dislike’ do not have Dutch equivalents that would be more appropriate words to use instead.

When trying to identify wordings that can be applied most easily in cross-national research, the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems opted for asking people to rate the extent to which they like or dislike particular parties, while using a 0–10 rating scale:

‘I’d like to know what you think about each of our political parties. After I read the name of a political party, please rate it on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that party and 10 means that you strongly like that party. If I come to a party you haven’t heard of or you feel you do not know enough about, just say so. The first party is [party A].’

The British Election Studies has used a similar format in its most recent editions, but in earlier years it used a five-point rating scale with all answer options labelled. For example, the BES 1992 asked respondents, ‘How do you feel about the Conservative Party?’, and respondents could choose between ‘strongly in favour’, ‘in favour’, ‘neither in favour nor against’, ‘against’, and ‘strongly against’. National election surveys in other countries have mostly adopted question formats that are comparable to those discussed above, although details may differ.

Whereas the above measures match the theoretical notion of a psychological attachment that involves an affective evaluation, election surveys have also included several measures of voters’ judgement about political parties on different dimensions. One example is the ‘future vote probability’ items that were developed in Dutch election studies and later also incorporated in the European Election Studies (Tillie, 1995; van der Eijk et al., 2006). Other examples are questions that ask voters to indicate which political party best represents their opinions, beliefs or interests. Because such items lack the pivotal affective component, we do not discuss them any further here.

The attitudes that are expressed in surveys via the type of items discussed above, which are those that people are consciously aware of and able to express, are sometimes referred to as ‘explicit attitudes’ (Nosek and Smyth, 2007). Because research has shown that evaluative and affective responses may occur automatically and unconsciously (Zajonc, 1980), some scholars have focused on ‘implicit attitudes’ (Greenwald et al., 2002; Greenwald et al., 2003). Indeed, research using the Implicit Association Test (IAT) has shown that in the electoral context, too, implicit attitudes help to predict and explain vote choice as well as other political judgements (Bos et al., 2018; Hawkins and Nosek, 2012; Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Theodoridis, 2013, 2017). Another study that measured implicit attitudes via skin conductance found such measures to be relevant for predicting partisan bias related to policy issues: such biases occurred primarily if implicit measures indicated physiological affective responses to party images (Petersen et al., 2015). Such tests are no substitute for standard survey items, however, because measures of implicit attitudes have a number of limitations: They are not easily embedded in surveys – and certainly not for large numbers of parties (IAT) or voters (skin response); they are rather costly and time-consuming; and their validity has been questioned (Blanton et al., 2009). For election surveys, the straightforward choice is to include only items that focus on explicit attitudes.

## **QUESTION WORDING EFFECTS**

The way that survey questions are formulated can have an impact on the answers that are obtained. There is a large body of research that demonstrates this in many different contexts (Schuman and Presser, 1996; Tourangeau et al., 2000). There is no reason to believe that general conclusions about question formats would not apply to measures of party attachments. Hence we can, for example, safely assume that scales with about 100 positions are less reliable than scales that use 10 or 11 positions (e.g., Kroh, 2007; Preston and Colman, 2000), and that labelling the values of a scale improves its reliability

(Krosnick and Berent, 1993; Krosnick and Presser, 2010). In addition, research on question wording in the context of measuring party attachments has resulted in some valuable further insights.

One of the key differences between question formats is that some include the names of the political parties, whereas others ask about party attachments without mentioning the party names. In one of the early studies on this topic in Europe, Kaase (1976) reported that in Germany the proportion of people reporting an attachment decreased strongly when party names were dropped from the question. Analyses of the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom also showed substantial differences in the number of partisans depending on the question format (Blais et al., 2001). Similar observations have been made for being an independent or having no attachment: if the question explicitly mentions this option, more respondents choose it and hence fewer report a partisan attachment (Baker and Renno, 2019; Blais et al., 2001). Consequently, the CSES questions about closeness result in higher numbers that claim partisanship than the traditional party identification items, which mention independence in the question (Barnes et al., 1988).

Another element of the question wording that has received scholarly attention is the words ‘think of yourself’ in the standard items. Burden and Kloffstad (2005) argued that since the items are intended to measure affective orientations, it would make sense to use the word ‘feel’ instead. So, in 2001 they conducted a telephone survey in Ohio that asked half of the respondents, ‘Generally speaking, do you usually feel that you are a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?’ and modified the follow-up questions accordingly. This format resulted in a somewhat larger proportion identifying as Republican, while also changes in the response time suggest that the question formats operate differently. Furthermore, with the modified questions, gender differences in partisanship vanished, albeit in different directions in the United States and the United Kingdom (Burden, 2008; Johns et al., 2011). In a telephone survey in California in 2005, however, the results could not be replicated; the author attributed this to the timing of the initial study and the role of anxiety shortly after the terrorist attacks on 9/11 in 2001 (Neely, 2007). So although there is evidence for question wording effects, the precise mechanisms are not yet fully understood.

Apart from question wording, other methodological topics that scholars examined include question order and response patterns. A study that compared different orderings of items about voting behavior and party attachments in the United States and the United Kingdom found no substantive differences (McAllister and Wattenberg, 1995, but see to the contrary Heath and Pierce, 1992). McAllister and Wattenberg (1995) attribute this to the fact that party attachments are well anchored and hence survey responses are less susceptible to such effects. This is not to say that all people respond in the same way. Research on feeling thermometers has shown that people differ in their use of such scales. This concerns not only the tendency of some people to agree more often with statements (acquiescence bias), or the tendency to provide more extreme answers (extremity bias), but also some effects of specific use of such scales related to people’s ideological position has been observed (Wilcox et al., 1989). These

effects are presumably unavoidable, but being aware of them will facilitate careful and accurate interpretation of analytical findings.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The psychological attachment between voters and political parties has been a central topic in research on mass political behaviour ever since the concept of party identification was introduced by Campbell et al. (1954, 1960). In this chapter we have provided a review of the conceptualization of political partisanship, as well as the most widely used measures. Furthermore, we have analysed how different question formats link up to the concepts they are presumed to measure, and evaluated the measurement quality of multi-item instruments. This endeavour allows for a number of important conclusions and recommendations about the measurement of party attachments. For sure, it is not possible to give one recommendation that fits all purposes. Instead, the ideal measure for party identification depends on the context, the data basis (own data collection or secondary data analysis), the conceptual framework that is used as grounds for the research, and the specific research questions.

We showed that traditional measures have their shortcomings as they only tap one dimension and do not allow to capture multiple or negative identifications. However, there are still three advantages of the continued use of the standard items in future surveys. First, the directional and strength measure link up well with the two key elements of social identities: self-categorization and importance of the attachment. This applies most strongly if the party names are included in the question, but unfortunately not all countries and languages allow for such verbal expressions. Second, using the same items across the years facilitates longitudinal research and comparisons across time. Third, even though a multi-item index appears to provide a superior measurement of the concept of partisan identities, the standard items still are reasonable indicators (Bankert et al., 2017). So for trend comparisons of shares over several years, in cases with severely restricted survey time, or when employing secondary data analysis, using the standard instruments is an appropriate choice. However, in all other cases we do recommend to use multi-item measures as they show better validity and allow more in-depth analyses (Bankert et al., 2017). If eight- or ten-item instruments are too long, shortened and validated scales with three or four items are available (see, e.g., Bankert et al., 2017; Mayer and Schultze, 2019). Furthermore, especially in multi-party systems, allowing for the measurement of multiple identifications should be strongly considered, as previous research showed a high prevalence for multiple identifications that affect voting choice and other political outcomes (e.g., Garry, 2007; Mayer, 2019; Schmitt, 2009).

In addition, the inclusion of attitudinal measures of partisanship appears particularly useful in multi-party systems, and if researchers are interested in negative partisanship. In a two-party system, knowing how much people like one party might say much about how they feel about the other party, even though both need not be perfectly correlated (Weisberg, 1980). In a multi-party system, the picture is more nuanced and mapping the affective orientation towards the political parties requires separate



measures for the evaluation of each individual party. For research on negative partisanship, attitudinal measures are also more suitable than identity-oriented measures, because the latter tend to focus on positive identification. Attitudinal measures virtually always allow for negative evaluations and hence negative partisanship can well be studied using such measures (see Abramowitz and Webster, 2018; Maggiotto and Piereson, 1977; Mayer, 2017b; Rosema, 2006; see also Chapter 7 in this volume by Bankert), which also allow to study multiple partisanship at the same time (see Chapter 23 in this volume by Franklin and Lutz). Another advantage of like–dislike ratings and feeling thermometer ratings is that they can be used to construct measures of affective polarization (see e.g., Iyengar et al., 2012; Lauka et al., 2018; Mason, 2015). Their main disadvantage, self-evidently, is that they do not link up to the notion of a social identity. Therefore, scholars who prefer this theoretical point of departure are served by the use of a multi-item scale grounded in this theory.

We see four important points for further research to advance the measurement of party attachments. First, the point of reference for partisans is still largely unknown territory. What do people consider as the object when they answer questions about partisanship: party elites, party supporters, or something else? Although some insights have been reached (e.g., Druckman and Levendusky, 2019), we are not aware of cross-national studies examining this in depth. Second, a difference between the United States context and multi-party systems is that in the latter political parties sometimes form (ideological) blocs. In such cases, questions about the attachment with parties might be supplemented with items tapping potential bloc identification or ideological identification (Hagevi, 2015; Lewis-Beck and Chlarson, 2002). Third, question wordings affect the outcomes when measuring party identification, but cross-national studies that focus on the size of these effects and their theoretical underpinning are still missing. Finally, the items used in multi-item indices for partisan identities function well, but studies that analyse whether potential other items perform even better remain welcome. As long as political parties are at the heart of electoral politics, measuring voters' psychological attachments with these parties as well as possible remains important.

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